Title of Topic: “The platform tomb of Firuz Khān during Jahāngir’s period at Agra: An empirical analysis”

Author Name: Dr SALIM JAVED AKHTAR,

Associate Professor (History), School of Law, GALGOTIAS UNIVERSITY, INDIA.

Abstract: A variety of architectural monuments were built during Jahāngir’s period. Among the various structures, which have survived in the form of tombs are the most noteworthy. The tomb architecture of this period had a unique aspect in the form of a lofty platform on, which the actual (main) tomb stood. The present research paper seeks to study the salient features of a platform tomb during Jahāngir’s reign through a detailed survey of the tomb of Firuz Khān on the west of the Agra-Gwalior road at Agra. The tomb of Firuz Khān presently situated in the locality Tāl-Firuz-Khān in the locality of Madhunagar at Agra. This structure was initially identified by A.C.L. Carleyle as the mausoleum of Firuz Khān made of double-stories red sandstone.

Keywords: Architectural features of complex, Transition phase, Red sand-stone, Map, Plans and Plates etc.

Introduction: Firuz Khān is identified as the eunuch or Khwāja-sarā2 of the palace to Akbar, who also built Firozabad.3 Regarded as one of the trusted servants of Jahāngir, Mansāb of 600 Zāt and 150 Sawār is ascribed to Firuz Khān in Tuzūk-i-Jahāngirī.4

Contents: It is generally held that the reign of Jahāngir was a period of ‘transition’ sandwiched between the reign of Akbar (the period of ‘birth’) and that of Shāhjahān (the period of ‘zenith’). Compressed between the monumentality of Humāyūn’s Tomb, the Bulānd Darwāzā and the Tāj Mahal, the other buildings and structures dating from the period of Jahāngir were peripheral, lacking the centrality of design and innovation.5 Recent works, however, have seriously challenged this view and tried to place the reign of Jahāngir in its proper perspective regarding architectural developments.6

During Jahāngir’s reign, many different tomb structures were experimented, and many ground plans were never used. Out of these new mentioned types of architecture, the tomb plans are flat-roof hypostyle halls with domed bays forming with the help of pillars.7 The tomb at Khusrāū Bāgh in Allahabad is one example of this type of architecture that we start to see during this period. This also involves new kind of plan that is not normally seen to be restarted before Jahāngir reign. Ebba Koch named this type of plan as platform tombs (takhtgāh).8

In this paper, an attempt is made to make a detailed study of a takhtgāh tomb in Agra. These tombs in their plan are based simply on a podium (takht). In most of these tombs, the building surrounding the graves is in the form of a podium (thus the term takhtgāh), which comprises vaulted bays or rooms within it. This design was initially inspired by simple structures comprising only a screen surrounding the deceased’s grave. The screen was known as hazīr or hazār, which ultimately came to be identified as hazīrāh. The earliest example of this hazīrāh was the tomb of Prophet of Islam in the Medina Mosque. However, by 11th Century A.D., the tomb acquired a specialized meaning and was extended to mean the ‘place of the grave’. According to Lisa Golombek, by the 15th Century A.D., the term came to connote tombs formed by small rectangular platform enclosures. Under the Timurids, the term stood for funerary platforms, also known as takht, meaning an elevated place of repose for sleeping, sitting, or reclining. Thus, according to some Timurid sources, a high and spacious takht was built for the tomb of poet Jami who died in 1492 A.D.9 The term suffāh (dias) was also applied for such structures.10 A typical example of a hazīrāh r

---

2. Jahangir, Tuzūk- i- Jahāngirī (1624), Ed., S. Ahmad, Ghazipur and Aliagar, 1863-64, p. 268. (Note: Khwāja-sarā work as a superintendent (officer-in-charge) of the royal harām (residence of the royal ladies).
7. “Barah Khamba” & “Chaunsath Khamba” in Delhi, “Solah Khamba” of Lucknow are all examples of Tombs of Salabat Khān at Agra. All these are the examples of new types of tomb architecture.
8. Ebba Koch, op.cit., pp.72-76.
takhtgāh tomb under the Mughals is seen for the first time at Dholpur, where an octagonal platform over the grave of Sadiq Muhammad Khân Herâtī was constructed sometime during the end of Akbar’s reign. Just as in the early Timurid versions, the tomb of Sadiq Muhammad Khân is in the form of a simple funerary platform, which is octagonal in shape. The superstructure contains a second low platform surrounded by latticed screens (the hazirāh) and pilastered kiosks in the corners. A small kiosk with a stepped entrance leads to the second platform. (See Plate’s 1.2 & 1.4)

Under Jahângir’s era, this plan is transformed into a full building type in which the main building or structure of the tomb takes the form of a platform or takht. Thus, we have variants of this plan at the ‘Tomb of Maryam’ near Akbar’s tomb in Sîkândarâ at Agra. The whole structure is a square ‘platform’ with octagonal kiosks and oblong cupulas at the corners of the superstructure. In the middle is a low platform with a replica of the grave. Jahângir’s tomb in Shahdara at Lahore is a grander version of this plan, with white marble pillars added to the four corners.

A distinct variation of this takhtgāh tomb can be discovered in the Firuz Khân Khwâjasârâ’s Tomb, a Jahângirian noble who passed away in 1057 A.H./1647 A.D. during the reign of Shah Jahân. As did many of his contemporaries, he also constructed his tomb during his lifetime, known after he called the Tâl-Firuz Khân, located close to the Agra-Gwalior Road. This pavilion like mausoleum is made of red sandstone and has an octagonal shape. (See Plate 1.1) Unlike the Sîkândara’s Tomb of Maryam or the Tomb at Dholpur, the super-structure has a smaller octagonal structure in the middle. (See Plan 1) The subsidiary octagonal storey, on the bottom floor, is where his real grave is located. (See Plan 3) On the main storey’s southern and northern sides, four rectangular pillared cupulas form a chaukhândis, and on the top is a pyramidal roof. (See Plate 1.7) These are protected by chhajja with bracket supports. (See Plate’s 1.5 & 1.6)

This mausoleum’s ground floor is made of an octagonal platform that is 13.10 Metres on either side. (See Plate’s 1.5 & 1.6) The pavilion that houses the cenotaph is resting on top. (See Plan 2) A two-story entry gateway with 2.85 Metres wide aperture was constructed on eastern side of plinth to provide direct access to the pavilion level. (See Plate’s 1.2 & 1.3) (See Plan 1)

However, the cenotaph is situated within the red sandstone octagonal pavilion, which is positioned in the middle of the octagonal plinth. A rectangular cupola on pavilion level on eastern side is now converted into a mosque. (See Plate’s 1.7 & 1.8) (See Plan 1) Identical, four-pillared pavilions are built on the southern and northern sides with 3.45mx2.8m measurements. (See Plate 1.7) This crypt is accessible from the south side within the plinth by a passageway 1.30m broad and 12.10m long. (See Plan 1.9) (See Plan 3) The sides of the building are both defined with three-closed arched recesses that were 1.17m in width, except the eastern side, which features the entry portal. (See Plan 1) The limited articulation makes it evident that the main building was intended to serve as a support structure for the pavilion-level buildings, which were to serve as the tomb’s major tourist attractions. The largest of all the constructions is the entrance monumental gateway built on the pavilion’s east side. It has two stories (double-storied), measuring 13.15mx4.45m with a height of 10.43m. (See Plate 1.3) (See Plan 1)

At the southeast and northeast corners, it had two chattris (kiosks), which are no longer survived. A wide staircase of thirteen steps ascends to the main platform from this entry gate. The roof of the gateway is accessible by two small stairs located on the south and north sides of the doorway. (See Plate 1.4) (See Plan 1) This portal’s sides and façade are richly and dramatically carved with chinikhâna patterns. On its corners are likewise four peacock birds. (Two red circle marks see Plate 1.10) The base of the central octagonal pavilion, 4.86 metres in height, is pierced with delicately carved screens which let light seep into a crypt below. It has sides that are 4.52 metres in length.

The pavilion is broken up by arched recesses 1.25 metres deep on all four sides. The interior, 3.15 metres on each side, octagonal chamber houses the cenotaph is accessible from south via stairs. This pavilion is an elegant architecture in articulation of the façade. In place of carvings covering the whole surface of the façade, only prominent architectural aspects like the spandrels and platform have exquisite carvings. The unusual usage of grey sandstone in addition to the red sandstone heightens the contrast between plain and ornamented surfaces. These contracts draw attention to certain aspects, resulting in a degree of sophistication achieved by simplicity instead of excess. This pavilion surprisingly does not have any engravings. This dome supports a very low-level drum. A few feet above the drum, it rapidly assumes a hemispherical form and has an extremely shallow profile. Indigenous in style are the intricately carved brackets and projecting overhangs (chhajjas). Above overhangs, every corner of an octagon-shaped structure is highlighted with a slender pinnacle of grey sandstone. (See Plate 1.7)

The mosque, which is relatively small, elegant and simple, is housed in the 5mx 3.15m pavilion on the western side. It has two supporting pillars and an open front. A single recess indicates the mihrab in the western stone wall. Ten musallaâhs (prayer locations) may be on the stone floor. High-quality grey sandstone was used to construct the two pavilions north and south. To support the overhangs, three brackets protruded from the wall. There are clear signs of glazed tiling in the brickwork above the overhangs, cornice, and frieze, which reveals an abundance of colours, including blue, green, yellow, and turquoise in the floral designs. These pavilions’ pyramidal roofs seem to have originally been tiled, but only their impression and vestiges may be seen today. (See Plate 1.7)

Conclusion

Both portals and pavilions are covered with exquisite chinikhâna panels with fine carvings of motifs like floral arabesques, confronted animals, wine carafes, and flowers. This building decoration style was typical to be seen in the Jahângir’s era and is

---

similar to the designs found on “Akbar’s Tomb” situated in Sikandra, “Surajbhan-ka-Bagh”, “I’timad-ud-Daula tomb”, and other architectures and monuments built during his reign. The tomb is set behind a large water tank (hauz) located on its eastern side, which gives the tomb a form of paradisical and typical look.

All its features make Firuz Khān’s Tomb at Agra a beautiful example of the style of the tomb with Timurid origins but are unique to the time in which these were built. The ground plans were simple and enhanced with a sophisticated style that emerged during Jahāngir’s reign.

References:
7. “Barah Khamba”&“Chaunsath Khamba” in Delhi, “Solah Khamba” of Lucknow are all examples of Tombs of Salabat Khān at Agra. All these are the examples of new types of tomb architecture.
8. Ebba Koch, op.cit., pp. 72-76.
Plate 1.1: Tāl-Firuz Khān front view

Plate 1.2: Monumental entrance gate
Plate 1.3: Front eastern view of main gate   Plate 1.4: Small kiosk’s on entrance gate

Plate 1.5: Northern view of the Tomb   Plate 1.6: Southern view of the Tomb
Plate 1.7: Tomb, Cupolas and Mosque view

Plate 1.8: View of the Mosque

Plate 1.9: Southern side entrance passage

Plate 1.10: Southern entrance gate wall

Arial view of Tomb and Tāl-Firuz Khān at Agra